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KGB defector recants, flees to Soviet Embassy

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WASHINGTON — Vitaly Yurchenko, a high-ranking KGB officer pictured as a prized defector to Washington, turned up at the Soviet Embassy here yesterday and accused the United States of abducting him, holding him against his will and offering \$1 million for his cooperation.

"On a business trip to Italy, I was forcibly abducted," Mr. Yurchenko said at an extraordinary news conference at the embassy. "I was forced to take some drugs and denied the opportunity to get in touch with official Soviet representatives."

He said he was able to "break out to freedom" Saturday when supervision over him was relaxed. He said that his time in the United States was "three horrible months for me" and that he now only wished to be among family and friends.

Mr. Yurchenko's return to Soviet control and his accusations dumbfounded official Washington.

The State Department hurriedly issued a statement denouncing Mr. Yurchenko's allegations as "completely false and without foundation."

Charles Redman, departmental spokesman, asserted that Mr. Yurchenko "defected of his own volition" to the U.S. Embassy in Rome on Aug. 1.

Mr. Yurchenko, 50, said he had not cooperated with U.S. authorities, to the best of his knowledge. "In the period when I was conscious and in control of my behavior, I did not pass any secret information," he said. When drugged, he went on, "I don't know what I was doing or saying... I was threatened."

"At no time have any of the things happened to him," Sen. David Durenberger, R-Minn., chairman of the Senate Select Committee on In-

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telligence, said after being briefed on the matter by CIA Director William J. Casey.

Mr. Yurchenko had been permitted to do "recreation-type things... that he always wanted to do," the senator said, but he did not elaborate.

Senator Durenberger said that it was precisely because Mr. Yurchenko "wasn't being drugged... he wasn't held in chains" that he was able to get to the Soviet Embassy.

The senator said that Mr. Yurchenko disappeared on Saturday after failing to show up for a scheduled dinner "with the CIA" and that he telephoned agency officials during the weekend or yesterday to inform them of his decision.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., vice chairman of the intelligence committee, said, "We have one of two things. Either he's trying to make up a story to get back into the good graces of the people he's with, or he was a double agent all along."

The State Department announced Sept. 26 that he had defected in August in Rome. The department said at the time that he was the fifth-ranking man in the Soviet intelligence agency, "specifically responsible for the direction of KGB intelligence operations in the U.S. and Canada."

Mr. Yurchenko was stationed in Italy at the time. From 1975 to 1980, it is believed that he served as a political officer at the Soviet Embassy in Washington.

Senator Durenberger maintained

that information provided to the CIA by Mr. Yurchenko since his defection so far had been proved valid. "All the stories checked out," the senator said.

In particular, information believed to have been supplied by Mr. Yurchenko led federal agents to Edward Howard, a former CIA employee suspected of giving secret information to the Soviets who has since disappeared.

Senator Durenberger said that information supplied regarding the Howard case had been "validated" and that there was "no indication" of false information.

At the news conference, Mr. Yurchenko said that the CIA offered him \$1 million tax free, plus salary and benefits worth another \$180,000 a year for life, in exchange for his cooperation.

He said he was held at a "safe house" on Virginia's Route 17 near Fredericksburg.

The Soviet said he met with Mr. Casey once during the past three months and that he was drugged at the time. "Later I have only vague recollections of the conversation, but it was a general conversation of vague policy issues regarding the summit — the things they usually write about in the newspapers."

According to Mr. Redman, of the State Department, Mr. Yurchenko signed a written request for asylum and was granted it. Since his arrival in the United States he "willingly cooperated" with the CIA and the FBI "in providing information about Soviet intelligence activities throughout the world and the organization of the KGB."

Mr. Yurchenko, he added, had the right to return to the Soviet Union, but the Reagan administration would insist on meeting him in person to satisfy itself that he was making the choice freely.

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The unusually speedy propaganda exploitation of the situation made by the Soviets came as Secretary of State George P. Shultz was opening a series of meetings in Moscow in preparation for the upcoming summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

Senator Durenberger told news conference that there would be "an assessment process" of the information supplied by Mr. Yurchenko in light of his defection back to the Soviets.

If the CIA had been "fed phony information, they would have detected some kind of a ruse," the senator said, adding that he thought it more unlikely that "we didn't spot a potential egg thrower."

Senator Durenberger said that the United States did not lose any sensitive information and in fact that the Soviets could have "egg on their faces" because they gave up information that was supplied by Mr. Yurchenko. The senator dismissed the importance of any information Mr. Yurchenko might be able to supply the Soviets regarding debriefing techniques of the CIA, saying, "Everyone knows how to do that."

George Carver, a former CIA official, said last night that he doubted the initial defection was a ruse. "Elaborate deceptions like that are a lot easier to set up in Chapter 23 of a spy novel than they are in the real world . . . to my mind, the simpler theory and more persuasive one was that you had a man who genuinely wanted to defect, then had second thoughts and changed his mind."

Senator Durenberger said, "I think the agency is as surprised as anybody else."

"Casey gave me the impression that the guy made the decision on his own," Mr. Durenberger said.

However, the senator said the agency was "not fully satisfied" that Mr. Yurchenko's return to the Soviets was voluntary, and the senator said the CIA would attempt to determine whether he has mental problems or was genuinely seeking to return to the Soviets.

Senator Durenberger said that regardless of the reasons for Mr. Yurchenko's return to the Soviets, "we've been gullible," but if the CIA was "taken in . . . they've been taken in by a pro."

Washington correspondents Gilbert A. Lewthwaite and Robert Timberg contributed to this article.